

Preservation Department History

The University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) Library has the only Preservation Department in a library or archives in Hawaii and the American Pacific. The Preservation Department initiates preventative steps and conservation treatment to preserve the UHM Library's collections. The cost of preventative conservation and treatment is less than the cost of replacing out-of-print collections or unique heritage collections that are used for teaching and research at the University of Hawaii.

In the 1980s research libraries in the U.S. began to explore methods to deal with critical problems that caused the library materials to deteriorate. Some of the problems identified were inherent to the structure of the material. For example, wood pulp paper (made from 1850 to the present) breaks down as it ages; it loses its strength and becomes brittle; eventually the paper self destructs and literally crumbles. Biological factors were also recognized as serious problems. Beetles, commonly called the "book worm," burrowed into the spines of books and also destroyed the strength of book covers and turned the paper into confetti. Disasters (fires, floods, storms, etc.) caused destruction of Library collections in a blink-of-an-eye. Librarians were increasingly concerned about damage to collections.

Preservation, a new Library profession, was born in the 1980s to develop standards and best practices to address the problems that were causing significant loss of collections.

To determine the condition of the collections the UHM Library conducted two condition surveys. The first in 1978 included the circulating collections and the Rare Book collections. This data was lost and never collated. In 1982, the latest technology (keypunch cards), was used to record and sort information by fields. The survey documented 22% of the books had brittle paper and 40% needed to be repaired. A handwritten report noted informal observations about the damage caused to the books by improper shelving, and the poor condition of the paper of books published in Russia.

Following up on these critical preservation needs, the "marking and mending" unit was created in 1983 to begin to address conservation issues, as well as, prepare new books for the shelf. The Library formed the *Preservation Working Group*.¹ This group prepared a written policy on the preservation of the collections:

The collections are essential to the teaching and research functions of the University. They also serve Hawaii residents and researchers throughout the Pacific and the world. The collections result from selective acquisitions over a period of time. They constitute a multi-million dollar investment and an invaluable resource. A program of stewardship is in the public interest. (Preservation of Collections, March 23, 1984)

Taking advantages of local professional resources, the UHM Library was an early member (ca. 1980) of the regional conservation center at Bishop Museum, Pacific Regional Conservation Center (PRCC). Regional conservation centers were being funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to serve communities by providing conservation expertise. PRCC had trained conservators on its staff and provided membership services to the Library including surveys, training and professional expertise. A 1990 survey of Hamilton Library still provides baseline information on environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, and light) that have damaged the collections, as well as the significant damage caused by beetle infestation

¹ The Preservation Working Group included Charlotte Ahrens, Michaelyn Chou, Aggie Quigg, Pat Shelden, Margie Smith, Bron Solyom and Phyllis Wilhoite-Nakasone. The Preservation Committee was expanded in 1986 with Eleanor Au, Jackie Ching, Vi Furumoto, Paula Mochida, Elva Mori, Kim Nakano, Zoe Stewart-Marshall, and Ted Taba, and added Nancy Morris in 1988.

and mold growth. PRCC helped guide the early stages of the UHM Library's preservation program.

The Preservation Working Group provided conservation training for the staff in the "mending" unit. Conservators from PRCC and California provided workshops in basic conservation treatment techniques. In 1987 a disaster preparedness seminar was conducted by Barclay Ogden of the University of California at Berkeley.

In 1990 the Preservation Department was officially established by transferring staff from three Library units. Aggie Quigg was appointed head of the department. She developed preservation policies and procedures, redesigned rooms assigned to the department, and initiated a comprehensive library preservation program. Two staff members were sent to University of California at Berkeley to attend "Basic Conservation Training for Research Libraries" in 1992. Over the next few years she acquired essential, highly specialized equipment for conservation treatment, and modeled the departmental organization (conservation, bindery and reformatting) on University of California at Berkeley, and based Library contracts in reformatting and commercial binding on recently agreed upon national preservation standards. A pest management program was started in 1993 to treat incoming gifts by freeze extermination.

With Ms. Quigg's retirement in 1996, Lynn Ann Davis was hired as department head. Davis was very familiar with preservation issues facing a cultural institution in Hawaii, had worked over twenty-five years addressing preservation issues in Hawaii. Building on Quigg's well established program she has created a "model preservation program" by continuing the development and professional training of staff, developing a more-cost effective approach to freeze extermination, re-organizing the department, and revising the disaster plan and training library staff teams to work with the Preservation Department in case of a disaster. In 2000 the department moved into a new facility in the Library Addition. The layout and new lab space was designed by Davis facilitated core work (conservation treatment, bindery, reformatting, and pest management) and prepared for the Library's future preservation needs by including a paper treatment lab and a digital photography lab.

UHM Library Preservation Department was prepared to respond to a major disaster when a torrent of water and mud swept through the ground floor of the Library submerging collections and knocking out the electrical infrastructure in October 2004. The Preservation Department and Library staff knew what to do because of the established collection disaster procedure and their training. The staff stabilized priority collections of maps and aerial photographs by freezing this material to prevent costly mold growth. The legacy of this 2004 disaster continues to impact the UHM Library as we celebrate the centennial of the University. Valuable maps and aerial photographs continue to receive conservation treatment in the Preservation Department lab. Additional equipment and temporary staff have been added to meet the specialize problems confronted daily in the lab. Every disaster is a training opportunity for other libraries as well. Davis continues to work with international, American and regional colleagues to discuss disaster preparedness and specific conservation issues caused by the flood.

Submitted by Lynn Davis, July 20, 2006.